

BOOK REVIEW

CYCADS OF SOUTH AFRICA, by Cynthia Giddy, with pp. 122, 32 colour plates and distribution maps. Cape Town, Purnell and Sons, 1974. R12,50.

This eminently readable book is indeed a valuable contribution to the growing number of popular books on indigenous South African plants. It is outstanding in its clear and intelligently devised sequence of chapters.

A world distribution map of the whole order and a brief account of the distribution of the three families are followed by some notes on the history of discoveries of *Encephalartos* in South Africa and an assessment of the present situation together with some thoughtful hints on their preservation for the future.

The chapter on general characteristics deals in unambiguous terminology with the stem, the roots, leaves, cones and the growth rate of the plants. This chapter is supplemented by a plate; morphology of cycads, showing in detailed drawings the characteristics of the whole plant, the leaf, leaflets, male and female cones.

The next chapter on reproduction gives a detailed account of pollination and fertilization, again supplemented by diagrams. Toxicity is briefly dealt with, but is followed by a comprehensive chapter on cultivation. It starts by a cleverly divided habitat analysis, listing the species according to their hardiness, then showing which characteristic leaf pattern falls into the various zones and finally bringing the rainfall pattern into the whole picture. Propagation, particularly by seeds, explaining the complex and time consuming maturing of the seeds is dealt with in great detail. Drawings of the seeds and seedlings at various stages of development support the written word. The various methods of vegetative propagation and methods of transplanting mature plants are also discussed in some detail. A short account of pests and diseases is followed by some hints about using cycads in landscaping and gardening.

With this chapter the general part of the book ends. The following chapter on varietal forms, hybrids and doubtful species leads into the special part of the book which starts off with a number of most helpful drawings, showing the median leaflets and seedling leaves of the various species in full size. Next comes the key to the species, using the leaflets as the main diagnostic character. An identification table at the end of the key lists all the critical characters of the species for easy comparison.

Two colour plates are devoted to the morphology of the cycads, damage and regrowth. And then detailed descriptions of all species follow, each of them supplemented by a distribution map and a full page colour plate consisting of 4-5 photos showing the plant in habitat and close ups of cones and leaves. A glossary of technical terms provides the uninitiated with that bit of extra information needed for the full understanding of the text.

Though the lavish colour photographs and Barbara Jeppe's skillful drawings certainly enhance the value of the book, it is this unpretentious, clear language and the consequent division of the text which makes it a good book, for which laymen and professionals alike can be grateful to the authoress.

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